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ABSTRACT

A study examined the theory concerning reader response and the rationale and practice of reader response in the high school English curriculum. Formal experimental studies existed that explored reader response practices in the high school setting, but no formal studies existed on the questioning practices of potential reader response teachers. A substantial body of literature was found that discussed the nature of reader response theory and that subsequently advocated its widespread and constant use in the English curriculum. Two methods were used to determine teachers' attitudes toward reader response and their use of reader response in the classroom: (1) three advanced placement teachers were observed teaching two different classes each; (2) each teacher was interviewed. Data indicates that the use of reader response theory in the classroom is determined largely by the types of questions teachers ask. In observing several teachers, the research found that questioning style, at least in relation to reader response, depends on knowledge of specific methodology reading theory, such as reader response, as well as individual teacher personality. The two (out of the three) teachers who did not regularly incorporate reader response theory into their teaching style preferred to have complete control of the classroom. (Contains 26 references and 2 appendixes containing interview questions and research findings.) (Author/TB)

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Reader Response Theory
in the High School English Classroom

By

Karen Yvonne Shelton

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
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ABSTRACT

Shelton, Karen Yvonne

READER RESPONSE THEORY

IN THE HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Thesis under the direction of Joseph O. Milner, Ph.D.,

Chairman of Education Department at Wake Forest University.

This study examined the theory concerning reader response and the rationale and practice of reader response in the high school English curriculum.

Formal experimental studies existed which explored reader response practices in the high school setting, but no formal studies existed on the questioning practices of potential reader response teachers. A substantial body of literature was found which discussed the nature of reader response theory and which subsequently advocated its widespread and constant use in the English curriculum.

Two methods were used to determine teachers' attitudes toward reader response and their use of reader response in the classroom: observation by the researcher of each teacher's classes and teacher interviews. Data indicated that the use of reader response theory in the classroom is determined largely by the types of questions teachers ask. This study recommends that opportunities for discussion of literature using reader response questioning and tactics be provided on a regular basis for all high school English students. If necessary, teachers should be trained in the philosophy, theory, and practice of reader response.

INTRODUCTION

"The literary experience...is first of all the immediate encounter between a reader and a book" (Probst 37).

This statement, defending the inclusion of reader response in the English classroom, posits an argument made by Probst in the March 1994 issue of The English Journal advocating the use of reader response methodology. Proponents of reader response believe a primary thinker/authority has been eliminated or at least largely excluded from the English classroom--the reader. The student is the often excluded reader who brings his or her own experience to each text, but who is rarely asked to elicit personal response or opinion about the reading in class discussion or in writing. This personal response, the connection between reader and text exclusive of teacher or critic, is the basis for reader response theory. According to Probst, "the purpose of literature programs in the elementary and secondary schools is to develop readers, not literary scholars or critics" (37). If reading is the primary focus, then the traditional English curriculum has led many students astray--those students who find reading intimidating, boring or confusing because they have been unable to grasp certain themes, or surmise the "correct" answers to the questions teachers ask regarding the text.

Classroom teachers agree that critical thinking skills are a major facet of the school curriculum, yet all too often students are given the teacher's understanding of a text, or the critic's, or the writer's, and rarely asked to

evoke connections between themselves as readers and the text, or develop opinions about the text based on their own personal experience. Teachers must realize that in order for students to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions on any subject, they must first be encouraged to do so. Students who are taught that there is only one right interpretation of a poem, only one theme in a short story, only one correct reason for the author 's inclusion of a particular scene will be unable to think for themselves not only about what they're reading, but about anything that requires critical thinking skills. Rosenblatt disagrees with such exclusive thought, instead believing "there is no such thing as a single, objective, unchanging meaning for a piece [of literature], and therefore an individual reads literature not to arrive at an objective meaning--or at the intended meaning of the author--but to create a personal interpretation for novel, short story, or poem (Responding to Poetry 69). In today's society of spoon-fed information, students must be taught and constantly encouraged to use their mind, to think for themselves, and search for answers within their own experiences.

While research indicates reader response theory is beneficial to students and in particular encourages critical thinking skills, most teachers do not have the training or understanding of reader response to incorporate it into their curriculum. Teachers need to know what sort of questions to ask during literature discussion, what writing assignments prove most helpful, and specifically they need to comprehend and believe in the concepts of reader response theory. Teachers who are teacher-centered, who prefer to lecture to their students and who do not encourage class discussion and

participation would have trouble adhering to the concepts of reader response. Teachers who are more student-centered, who believe students are the focal point of the classroom and who encourage student ownership and responsibility will find the ideas inherent in reader response enlightening and refreshing. Yet even student-centered teachers initially face difficulty relinquishing control of literature discussion and adhering to the principle that the text can mean different things to each reader.

According to several teachers who are incorporating reader response theory into their English curriculum, the most difficult aspect of reader response is the questions asked during class discussion. Teachers must formulate questions in such a way that discussion and individual interpretation are encouraged. What reader response teachers must do is ask questions about an activity that is predominantly personal and individual, in such a way that individual interpretation and creative and critical thinking are encouraged. It is useful to examine the body of research existing on reader response in considering the justification for reader response theory in the English classroom.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical History and the Development of Reader Response

In order to glean an understanding of the development and current practice of reader response theory, we must first consider the justification for reader response and the reasons for its incorporation into the high school English classroom. Researchers agree that reader response arose as a result of and argument against previous textual-centered theory, particularly New Criticism. According to Jane Tompkins, reader response, or transactional theory, "arises in direct opposition to New Criticism" (ix). New Criticism tends to focus and concentrate on what can be found in the text, while reader response takes the ideas of textual reading a step further and "assumes an equal closeness of attention to what that particular juxtaposition of words stirs up within each reader" (Rosenblatt 137). For the high school student, this evolution in pedagogy means the difference between passive reading, where a knowing critic, or in many cases the teacher, shares the true meaning of the text, where teachers focus "exclusively on what the text says and on what the text means without acknowledging or addressing the reader's role in the construction of those meanings" (Beach and Marshall 70) and active reading, where "readers may bring to the text experiences, awareness, and needs that have been ignored in traditional criticism" (Rosenblatt 142). Opponents of New Criticism disagree with such strong emphasis on the text and concern themselves with the "human meaningfulness of the literary work" (Rosenblatt 29), the relation of the work to students' own experiences.

In fact, reader response critics would argue that a work is insignificant outside of its results (psychological and otherwise) on the reader. Meaning would have no significance "outside of its realization in the mind of a reader" (Tompkins ix). According to Tompkins, and most proponents of reader response theory, the text exists within the reader and each reader brings different experiences to the text. Thus, readers will create diverse interpretations and reactions based on prior beliefs and attitudes. As students mature, they "exhibit stronger relationships between perceived similarity to story characters and factors of reader identification and suspense" and as students move into secondary school they "demonstrate an increasing ability to search for underlying psychological attributes, long-range goals, and metaperspectives of story characters" (Hynds 31). In a successful reader response classroom, students will constantly make this search and attempt these connections with characters--the responsibility for developing such a participatory environment lies with the teacher's prior organization. Yet, before an understanding of design and format in a reader response classroom can be considered the factors which led teachers to alter their perceptions and style must be discussed.

During the 1920s increasing numbers of children were attending schools and reading interest studies showed that they preferred popular books rather than texts that were seen as classics. In the 1940s , '50s and '60s college literature instruction played a large role in the development of high school English curriculum and instructior. "Organized primarily around historical periods and carried out predominately according to the methods of New

Criticism, [college instruction] greatly influenced the directions literature instruction would take in the secondary school" (Beach and Marshall 16).

Since the 1960s, controversy has existed between two poles--the conservatives who are proponents of basic skills in reading and writing, using only "the classics", and the liberals, who are incorporating various theories such as reader response into a classroom where change is rapidly taking place. Unfortunately, "the capacity to participate in verbally complex texts is not widely fostered in our educational system, and desirable habits of reflection, interpretation, and evaluation are not widespread" (Rosenblatt 143). Later researchers describe the alteration Rosenblatt sought in the late 1930s, stating "recent literary theory has come to view literature less in terms of the writer and more in terms of the reader" (Purves 159). The key at this point is "theory" which does not imply such ideas are being widely incorporated into the classroom. In fact, Darren Smith believes students "rarely, if ever, get excited at the thought of fulfilling a reading assignment. This lack of enthusiasm, he feels, may result from texts being used in a way that implies reading is simply a passive act of collating facts and ideas without any purpose" (Common Ground 630). A discrepancy, as usual, exists between theory and practice, although classroom teachers are practicing reader response in their classrooms in increasing numbers.

Another reason for the lack of cohesion between theory and practice is the misinformation and difference in teaching style between college and high school instructors. According to Delia, "literature reform, based on radically conflicting theories, has resulted in chaos" (333). It would seem that high

schools and colleges rarely coincide on their views on the teaching of English. Often as the college phases out a particular method or theory, the high school will begin a slow transition into its use and widespread incorporation, or vice versa: thus the two are almost never in agreement. As Delia explains, students "exit high school well-trained in responding to literature at the personal and subjective level, but completely unprepared for college courses requiring them to analyze it from either traditional or challenging new interdisciplinary perspectives" (333). Most proponents of reader response would argue with Delia's statement, believing instead that adequate immersion in reader response in high school would prepare a student for higher levels of thinking, discussion and more broad understanding in college. If instead high school teachers continue with traditional or New Criticism theory in the classroom the students will be unprepared to make connections with the readings and perhaps dislike reading altogether.

An additional problem is the dilemma left to students in traditional high school classrooms: to state implicitly what they think the teacher wants to hear, or do otherwise and risk failure. As Hynds believes, "...students know that there are a variety of possible interpretations to any literary text, but they implicitly agree to arrive at and conform to the teacher's preferred response in order to succeed in school" (124). If there were in fact specific, correct answers to the texts, as many critics and teachers believe, then the traditional method would prove successful, but many people now believe the meaning of a text lies in the reader, and here lies the controversy: which theory is correct? Rosenblatt states in The Reader, the Text, the Poem the

purpose of New Critics:

> The New Critics had set themselves the seemingly modest task of explication of texts. The task of criticism, it was said, is 'to put the reader in possession of the work of art.' They did perform an important service in insisting that the text was not simply a biographical or historical document....In creating the image of the impersonal critic, they neglected to recognize themselves and others as first of all individuals and, even at their most impersonal, still highly personal readers. (139)

New Criticism came into vogue over sixty years ago and teachers are still adhering to the methods stated above.

Rosenblatt goes on to state a further problem with such theory: "Literature became almost a spectator sport for many readers satisfied to passively watch the critics at their elite literary games" (140). Unfortunately, the critics in such cases were (and are) often classroom teachers. Lunn further instantiates the certainty of textual meaning when reading poetry via a New Critical approach versus reader response. "Interpretation means discovering the objective meaning of a piece, determining the author's intended meaning, and reading and responding objectively to the piece itself, not to the biography of the writer or to the cultural or social history of the time in which it was created" (68). As stated earlier, New Criticism does not completely disagree with reader response theory; in fact, many critics would agree reader response is a valid offshoot of New Criticism. Yet to discuss classroom practice in terms of only these two theories is to ignore a large

portion of what takes place in the majority of high school English classrooms--a rather historical approach to teaching literature through lecture and testing. Historical classroom discourse differs from New Criticism theory, and quite possibly theory of any sort, in its lack of justification and research support.

In a traditional classroom "students spend the better part of their time memorizing the information they read in preparation for forthcoming tests. At the same time, teachers create guide questions (and tests) which force students to adhere strictly to the format, style, and contents of their textbook" (Common Ground 630). From what source does such a stagnant format arise? Do we blame teacher training programs, or teachers themselves for believing they as the teacher have all the answers? Smith speaks of reading in particular as influenced by such teachers. "...Reading simply becomes the transmission of information that is mediated by the teacher" (630). Hansson explains the dilemma even further: "...the reader's side of literature is almost completely neglected--in spite of the fact that the production of literary meanings is enormous on the reader's side, carried out as it is over a very broad spectrum of interpretive communities..."(141). Educators, according to these researchers, must realize the importance of the individual reader and leave traditional, albeit safe, methods behind.

Hansson believes the problem is the "theoretical and often complex models of analysis which teachers of literature have been trained to use, and which new generations of readers are taught to use when they talk and write about literature...they allow very little room...for the readers and their production of meanings and values" (145). Hansson, then, thinks the

problem lies in teacher education and in teachers' apparent lack of understanding that students have as much ability and right to an opinion about the text as a teacher or critic. Yet the difficulty in transition stems not only from the teacher's role but also widespread opinion about the role and power of the particular author under study. Hansson feels "traditional teaching has concentrated almost exclusively on the author....The reader is either completely absent or badly neglected..." (147). In a traditional English classroom the students are discouraged from developing their own opinions about texts, particularly ones that do not agree with the "correct" understanding determined by the teacher or critic. According to Lunn, "although it is quicker and easier-on the surface-to tell students the correct meaning of a poem, that meaning becomes valid only for the teacher and never for the student" (73).

Until recently society failed to realize that students must be responsible for their own learning and must be able to think in a variety of situations, not just transmit memorized knowledge about a particular work or author. "To convince students that knowledge is something they can be given ready-made," states Aker, "is to trap them, to discourage them from thinking and exploring, to make them gullible....Knowledge is personal: each of us has to remain at the center of his own learning" (106). This belief is perhaps at the center of reader response theory: the idea that students have the capacity to make their own decisions based on prior knowledge. A disturbing fact is the slow transition from traditional methods (both historical and New Criticism) to reader response and related styles of teaching. Pritchard, in "Developing

Writing Prompts," relates a 1989 study by James Marshall which indicates that "seventy-five percent of teachers' questions focus on prompting knowledge of the text, with only twelve percent eliciting a student's background or prior knowledge" (24). Figures such as Marshall's illustrate the slow transition and lack of either understanding or interest in reader response, and perhaps new theories in general, from the teachers.

The Role of the Reader in Reader Response

The reader is the focal point in reader response theory, unlike traditional classrooms where he or she is often ignored as an individual and as a collective voice. If discussion, analyzation and interpretation are considered in light of their use throughout history, reader response technically dates back to Socrates. Literature presents a primarily human experience where individuals "meet extremely compelling images of life that will undoubtedly influence the crystallization of their ultimate attitudes, either of acceptance or rejection" (Rosenblatt 20). If students are never given such an experience, then what shall we say develops and influences their attitudes? Students with no full opportunity to say what they think about books are more likely to discuss television and other media among themselves than they are books, largely because of the accessibility and authority they feel towards media and the sense of helplessness towards understanding literature. In reader response, responsibility for engaging a text is developed and encouraged for both media and literature-- all modes of discourse demand a personal response.

According to Rosenblatt, "the reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text" (31). While this information would encourage some teachers to attempt reader response and elicit more conversation and personal interpretation of the text, it would also cause other teachers to remain in the comforting shelter of traditional teacher role as 'the one with the answers'. Teachers have perhaps forgotten the emotions they experience when reading, the processes they undergo and the very personal reactions they have to particular texts. Bleich believes "...literature exists altogether on the basis of the subjective re-creation of the reader" (96). If this more extreme statement is true, then the teacher is providing nothing more than general information by relaying his or her interpretations (or the critics) to students who should instead be taught to develop their own constructions of that text.

Added support for a reader response approach emerges from the emphasis now placed on the development of critical thinking skills. The English teacher has a responsibility to do more than pass along knowledge which students may or may not agree is valid or acceptable. The responsibility is particularly true when considered in light of Hynds' statement, "as readers make autobiographical associations they discover more about their own growth, as well as their attitudes and beliefs about the world in which they live" (121). The transition lies within the beliefs of the teacher-

-how much power should highly informal readings of literary works be allowed to hold? If teachers prefer passive learners who listen to "the truth" about a text and rarely question the text's authority, then reader response will not become a part of the classroom.

Yet, some teachers would argue reader response places too much emphasis on the affective domain and not enough on basic skills. Admittedly, "readers also learn to understand and interpret social and interpersonal relationships, as well as the norms and conventions of particular cultures" (Hynds 121), in reader response. The question is whether the teacher finds such knowledge worthwhile and valid for the English classroom.

Considering transactional reading in an either/or manner is also incorrect: teachers need to realize they would not be sacrificing textual and interpretive knowledge for success in the affective domain. Rosenblatt explains the nature of responsibility placed on the student through reader response: "The reader needs to slough off the old self-image as passively receiving the electric shocks of the verbal stimuli. Then the quality of the work-as-experienced is seen as a function also of his close attention to the qualitative nuances produced by his own handling of his responses" (132). The reader now has more command and responsibility of the reading process and can be held accountable in a more positive fashion than traditional measures of tests and quizzes on minute content details. Miller's study of Laura Jackson, a classroom teacher who uses reader response, showed that Laura's respect for her students' opinions and ideas "created new role

expectations for her student and herself" (54). The students began to believe there were no definite answers and eventually developed a strong sense of community. As Miller states, "there was a sense that they were going somewhere together in this collaborative reading they engaged in by 'trafficking in human possibilities rather than in settled certainties'" (54). Such endeavors create initially a sense of danger in the classroom--students are surprised and hesitant about the thought of actually being encouraged to have an opinion about a text that is neither affirmed nor contradicted by the teacher.

Inhibiting the fear and confusion is difficult initially for the reader response teacher. Yet according to Henly, "the range and depth of issues that the students found amazed and then delighted me [in reference to Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye] . Had I prepared a list of themes I wanted them to find, I could not have included all that they found" (16). Statements like this one are common among teachers who have incorporated reader response into their curriculum, once they realize that learning will take place without the transmission of their divine knowledge of the text. Wilson gives further credence to the students' ability: "When students read to answer their own questions, they read with attention, often noticing words or images we might never have thought to point out" (65). The key is to correctly and thoroughly instruct the students in reader response, from journals to small groups to whole class discussion and to guide them when necessary not toward the "correct" answers, but toward more thought-provoking and thoughtful discussion.

Instructional Method

In discussion, journals and small groups, proponents of reader response encourage personal response to the texts, (particularly in the early stages after reading), the kind of response often feared in traditional classrooms. Kopald praises this response in her classroom and feels successful if the responses are personal, if the students "encounter art intimately in terms of their own lives and their own struggles with identity" (57). Teachers who use reader response must have the patience and understanding to allow the discussion to travel in unplanned and uncharted territory and to wait for the responses which will illuminate the most important aspects of the text, as defined by the readers. A study by Lunn indicates there are three broad elements in a student's reading process: perceive, interpret and enjoy. Following are the specific stages in the reading process as Lunn found in her study of an "average" group of high school students. The group was directed to read a specific poem thoroughly and several times, then speak into a tape recorder their thoughts and understanding of the poem. According to Lunn the student (1) reads, rereads, and rereads (2) associates (3) interprets (4) restates and paraphrases in own words (5) frequently quotes verbatim (6) responds emotionally (7) loops back (8) connects elements of the poem (9) generalizes by creating an overall meaning and stating general themes (10) revises initial interpretations and evaluations (11) evaluates the worth of the poem (70). According to Lunn's results, students will automatically process textual information in a format

similar to reader response, which indicates that teachers who do not follow such a process are potentially alienating and confusing their students.

If responses are stifled indefinitely, students will eventually fail to respond at all to the text, resulting in apathy toward reading in general. Rogers utilizes a quote by T.S. Eliot to express her view of the nature of student involvement in textual interpretation: "There are many things, perhaps, to know about this poem, or that, many facts about which scholars can instruct me which will help me to avoid definite misunderstandings; but a valid interpretation, I believe, must be at the same time an interpretation of my own feeling when I read it" (Rogers 60). Perhaps Eliot would not have agreed that every student is equally capable and deserving of an individual interpretation based on prior knowledge and emotional response, but teachers who are willing to guide students when necessary and keep silent when not will find his statement valid for any reader.

In order for the reader to provide valid interpretation as discussed above, teachers must first help establish a strong sense of community and safety in the classroom. According to Purves, "...the community of readers that the student-reader inhabits determines something of the student's response to the poem and thus helps to explain the commonality of readings of a text within a community, as well as the individuality that may occur within that community" (159). If students do not feel comfortable sharing what may sometimes be personal details and connections to the readings, if the teacher has not designed a classroom where ideas are accepted without judgment, then a true reader response classroom cannot exist. Rosenblatt

considers the nature of community in reader response an extension of learning, a way to increase insight and understanding of a text by listening to others' responses. A reader who has a strong emotional response to a text often wishes to discuss these reactions with others, to voice them aloud, to "clarify and crystallize his sense of the work." The reader wants to hear what other people think, and will often in the process realize how "people bringing different temperaments, different literary and life experiences to the text have engaged in very different transactions with it" (The Reader, 146). Deutelbaum accounts for such varying responses as both "similar sources of reality"and "individual differences among respondents" (98), either of which is completely justified in the reader response classroom.

Reader response teachers often use small communities to initiate conversation about a text and to provide a framework for later large group discussion. In his article "From runned to ran" Don Aker describes his process of instilling a sense of community in students. He noticed students often encouraged each other to "give reasons for their responses and to justify their opinions" and found that in the sharing of responses readers forced each other to "rethink original responses" (109). Aker's goal, like many reader response teachers, was to make the students understand that there are few absolutes in literature or in their lives. By eliciting and encouraging multiple interpretations, reactions, and connections teachers not only involve students in the learning process and make the text accessible, they also inadvertently teach lessons about life, lessons students often do not expect to arise from assigned reading or class discussion.

Hansson believes it is necessary to use a different kind of language for discussing literature: "what we need is a partly new language...which does justice to the reader's role in the production of meanings and values in literature" (143). Particular styles of both spoken and written language can influence students significantly, depending on what the teacher hopes to accomplish--the classroom language can either encourage free responses and honest interpretation or it can stifle and frighten the young thinker who is unsure about his or her reactions. The language of reader response classrooms, according to Hansson, is "descriptive and analytic language which--in its references as well as in its implications--makes it clear what the reader's role in literature actually is" (145). Most importantly, this language would discourage one particular word or phrase the teacher "is looking for" in interpretation. Language in reader response classrooms is personal, because it belongs to the individual reader, and may often contain slang or grammatical errors. The goal is confidence in speaking and sharing with others, deeper interpretations and thoughtful responses; if students are concentrating on the more technical aspects of formal speech, much of the response will be lost.

Contrary to the beliefs of some high school English teachers, the methodology for incorporating reader response into the classroom does not appear spontaneously in classroom activities: it must be studied, preferably observed and incorporated gradually as the teacher feels more comfortable with the evolution of the classroom, with the "loss of control" and heightened student interest. Beach and Marshall, in their book Teaching

Literature in the Secondary School, provide teachers with valuable activities and methods for using reader response, particularly for initiating thought through writing. Following is a partial list of their recommended activities for initiating later essay writing or discussion:

1. think alouds: students freely express associations; stream of consciousness; most useful for responding to short segments of texts; teachers should demonstrate their own thinking process first; students pair up afterwards and serve as an audience for each other
2. retelling: students recount, summarize, or abstract what happened in the text. They are highlighting the important events and relying on their knowledge of narrative text structure; helps sort out relevant details.
3. freewriting: written version of oral think-alouds
4. reading journals: students record initial thoughts to the readings at designated intervals
5. learning logs: students respond to reading/class discussion, etc. in journal format
6. question asking: teachers begin a discussion with students' questions, or author's chair, panel-discussion, microteaching, question box
7. story boards: transform events into script, these into scenes; portraying characters as stick figures
8. role play: students role play scenes from texts, or debate an issue in class discussion

While these suggestions are by no means all of the methods for beginning reader response with a particular text or for the year, they do provide a

framework for reader response teachers to follow and by their obvious concentration on thought and the thinking process an illustration of reader response methodology.

Beach and Marshall stress, as do previous researchers, that "one of the most direct ways for teachers to share control of classroom talk...is to move students into smaller groups" (59). The small group format enables teachers to ease into the logistics of reader response, to observe students on a more informal basis than whole group and gradually relinquish control to the students. Miller describes the use of small groups in her observations of Laura Jackson's classroom:

> Laura often planned small group discussions, in which, as with journal writing, students could make sense informally for a more intimate audience before thinking together in whole-class discussion....[This] procedural format provided support for students to express their responses privately and stimulation for them to extend their thinking and understanding publicly. (52)

Small group discussions also provide ample opportunity to develop a more reader-centered language necessary for open responses to literature.

In addition to small group discussion, teachers often utilize informal writing assignments to initiate and guide class discussion or to formulate initial thoughts on the reading. In Laura Jackson's classroom, students "nearest- at -hand language" is encouraged, particularly during initial reactions. Laura asks her students to write in their reading journals before, during and after reading a text to "capture their initial thoughts, feelings, and

questions in a private exploration...." (51). Laura found this method highly successful because as her students came to feel that their journal writing served a real purpose "they became willing to respond, and their responses became the center out of which further talking and thinking developed with Laura's support" (51). Journals easily lead into class discussion and often provide a more solid basis from which to begin sharing, thus eliminating the awkward silences often found during the early stages of reader response usage. Laura would often ask her students to share their journal entries with the class in order to hear others' views and to initiate "an interplay of differences which provoked questioning, extending and qualifying" (51).

Prereading prompts too are helpful in directing interest and eliciting curiosity in readers. Pritchard believes these prompts are designed to "encourage curiosity, to activate prior experiences and feelings, to help students to connect personally with characters, themes or issues and to predict events and character behavior" (25). Pritchard uses similar methods during and after reading which provide a basis for oral discussion and questioning. She believes that "personal, informal expressive writing helps readers take an exploratory stance and fosters insights into the literature they read" (30). When students write as they read, their impressions and reactions alter, evolve and become more clear. Knowing that these written reactions are ungraded and read by the students themselves for the most part encourages students to take risks, make assumptions and stretch their interpretive skills, particularly when they know discussion using those explorations will follow. According to Kopald, "informal reactions are opportunities for students to

sort through a myriad of impressions before discussion. These papers often give students a chance to identify what disturbs them, or what does not make sense, good places for discussion to begin" (57). If used as a basis for discussion and not as a means of grading or formally checking for completion of reading assignments, such informal writing can encourage more thinking about the literature and can increase the trust and confidence necessary for a successful reader response classroom.

The Role of the Teacher

While responsibility in reader response classrooms may rest largely in the hands (and voices) of the students, the teacher must initiate the discussion, allow the classroom to alter from teacher to student-centered, and constantly monitor the level and depth of learning which is taking place. Teachers are responsible for guiding class discussion in varying degrees, depending on the students and level of experience in reader response. They must also create "thinkers" in the classroom, students who develop their own interpretations and who attempt to validate suppositions with textual proof. Rosenblatt defines this responsibility as "enabling the students to make intelligent judgments" (176). These judgments in the English classroom relate to literature, grammar, writing, etc. but teachers know that the skills learned in interpreting and discussing Huck Finn can be translated to each student's personal life, outside of the English classroom.

Teachers who are using reader response methods are also in fact incorporating higher order thinking skills and questioning in their

classroom. Purves discusses this relationship in "The Idea of Difficulty": "...considering the incredible complexity of what it means to "understand" literature, it is important to realize that simply asking "higher order" questions will not automatically promote the multidimensional insights and emotional responses necessary for a complete encounter with literature" (123). Students often reveal that they reply with stock responses to these "higher order" questions, merely speaking what the teacher has more or less emphatically requested, not what they (the student) believe, feel or even think. The teacher can direct questions in such a fashion that the expected answer is immediately apparent, or at the least the teacher's stance on a subject is clearly identified. "Often," believes Purves, "this interpretive culture created by teachers' questions stifles, rather than enlarges, the multiple and complex understandings essential to the literary experience" (123). While well-meaning teachers assume they are encouraging students to grapple with difficult and thought provoking material, the interest is rarely present and this lack of excitement leaves teachers frustrated and angry. The problem lies in knowing what questions to ask and how much to involve students in this question asking. According to Hynds, "questions should exist, not to portray literature, but to invite readers to share in it. And in that questioning and sharing of experience, students and teachers become empowered to embrace the difficulties and complexities unique to literary reading" (136). The sharing described by Hynds can be developed in multiple ways, but it is important to remember that "in planning activities, teachers should probably assume that their primary goal is to foster their students'

articulation of honest and intelligent response" (Beach 129).

Where does the teacher belong in this response? Beach later describes that role:

> Throughout discussion, the teacher plays a significant though very specific role. She seldom, if ever, offers her own perspectives, and she is aware that if she intrudes her view, the students are less likely to offer their own. Rather, the teachers' role here is to show students how to connect their remarks to one another, to teach them how to build upon what has gone before.... (65)

English teachers who have incorporated reader-response pedagogy into their classroom vary in the degree to which they follow the guidelines set above. There are many reasons for the lack of reader response methodology in the English classroom: teachers fear a loss of control; they do not understand the methodology; they have incompatible personalities, and they prefer traditional teaching methods. Yet according to Beach and Marshall, much of the hesitancy can be eliminated if teachers realize that a stable structure can still exist in the classroom. They write, "students will rarely be able to talk or write about literature unless teachers provide a meaningful structure for their efforts--a structure that allows them freedom at the same time it points them in potentially rewarding directions" (101). Allowing students to ask questions and control the discussion (at least to an extent) does not mean the teacher has no purpose and should not be involved. In particular, the reader response teacher must be prepared to ask open-ended questions which provoke discussion.

One of the problems with questioning in the classroom is that all too often teachers "encourage students to look for easy answers rather than to grapple with the essential complexity and incompleteness of literary texts" (Purves 117). Teachers often do not prompt students to reach for alternative solutions/explanations in the text because they believe only one correct answer exists in literary interpretation. Beach and Marshall encourage teachers to have an open view of the text and to ask "open" questions in order to empower students and make them true participants in literary interpretation. Questions which demand active thinking and for which there are many answers produce active learning in students, whereas rote memorization and constant reference to the author's intention or critics' interpretation produce only passive learning. Miller calls this active learning through open questions "literate thinking." He describes Laura's success with open questions: "in listening to students, in allowing them to work out possible answers, in nudging Janet to make explicit her emerging understanding of Gordie's internal change, Laura supported students' use of their own language and experience to develop literate thinking" (52). Implicit in discussions fostered by teachers like Laura is the portrayal of a safe, comfortable environment where students know their various interpretations, their language, and their experiences will be accepted by the class and the teacher.

In order to create such a environment, teachers must "act as a specially trained and sensitive person who could show others how to create rich, fully detailed, persuasive, yet confidently personal responses to literature" (Lunn

69). Teachers have to be comfortable enough with themselves to allow and develop such an environment, gradually over the course of the year encouraging students to take risks and seek deep, personal reactions to the literature, what Nelms calls the "shock of recognition" (26). In Hynd's study, students professed that "when teachers model literature as a way of learning about and reflecting upon life, when they are willing to act as co-learner rather than expert in that process, and when they offer choices of response modes and assessment measures, these connections are likely to be much stronger" (58). Students need to know that the teacher is fallible and does not claim to know all the answers to any work of literature they study.

The practice of reader response theory relies heavily on the environment that teachers create in their individual classrooms and the types of questions they ask in the study of literature. If teachers fail to create safe environments where open questions are asked and honest and insightful answers are given, and questions are posed by students as well as teachers then a true reader response classroom does not exist. In a reader response classroom, according to Aker, "each impression is a valid one" (110). Teachers need to realize this fact first of all; the rest will fall into place with careful planning and the nurturing of an environment where open questions are inevitable and encouraged by both students and teachers.

METHODS

Subjects

The target population for this study was all high school English teachers and their students in the United States. The accessible population was the English classes in Forsyth County. The sample selected for this study was three advanced placement English teachers at the Winston-Salem/ Forsyth County Career Center, with two classes for each teacher. The sample, while not indicative of the range of all high school English students, helped narrow the focus of the study and allowed the researcher to concentrate on class discussion and predominantly higher level questioning. This twenty percent minority, co-ed population consisted of eleventh and twelfth grade advanced placement students from the entire Forsyth County. Two female and one male teacher, ranging in teaching experience from eight to twenty years, participated in the study. This selected population was representative of the target for the purposes of this ethnographic study, since it was not experimental and thus did not require strict population controls.

Instruments

This ethnographic study attempted to observe and record what actually occurred in the classrooms of the three advanced placement teachers. No manipulation of classroom activities, discussion, etc. occurred. The instruments used in this study were note-taking, audio tape recording and

pre-study interviewing. The use and description of each of these instruments is found under procedures.

Procedures

After selecting the Career Center, and specifically advanced placement English classes, for the focus of this research, the researcher had to obtain the approval of each of the classroom teachers to use the collected data from the observations in the research study. After obtaining each teacher's written consent to participate in the study and a pre-study interview, the researcher interviewed each of the three teachers separately. Afterwards, the researcher observed between eleven and thirteen class sessions with each teacher. A total of thirty-five classes were observed in all. During each class, the researcher sat either in the back of the room or occasionally in an empty desk in the class and noted the questions asked by each teacher. The observer noted particularly questions asked regarding specific textual material under discussion. In addition to taking notes, the researcher used an audio-recorder to obtain specific answers to questions and as a second reference for the results. Each teacher consented to and was aware of the recordings but the students were not. The focus of the study was on teacher questions and thus did not involve student questioning/response. The researcher did not want to alter the classroom setting or dynamics in any way with unnecessary student concern about the recording. The teachers were unaware during the research of exactly what the researcher was studying other than it involved interaction between teachers and students.

Before the observations began, the researcher interviewed the teachers to ascertain whether each one considered her/himself more teacher or student-centered in the classroom. The researcher sought information from each teacher regarding openness to new ideas and practices in the classroom, amount of discussion in their classes and their attitudes toward student empowerment (see Appendix B for copy of interview questions). Since the purpose of the study could not be revealed at this time, some of the questions were included in order to leave the research ambiguous. The researcher met with each teacher after the observations were complete to explain the purpose of the study and allow each teacher the opportunity to withdraw from the study. All three teachers chose to remain in the study. The teachers will remain anonymous, and will be known hereafter as Teacher A, B, and C.

After obtaining the data, the researcher organized the observations of questions asked in the advanced placement classroom into categories based on their adherence to Probst's criteria for reader response questions. An explanation and analysis of these findings can be found in the "Results" chapter. The "Discussion" chapter considers the implications of the research.

RESULTS

Organization of Findings

The types of questions observed in the classrooms of the three advanced placement English teachers generally fell somewhere between the two extremes indicated by Probst: the traditional questions where students "learn that the process of thinking about a literary work consists of answering questions posed by an authority, hoping that the interrogation will lead to some clearer vision" (41) and at the other end of the spectrum reader response questions. According to Probst, "the questions we raise to help students read and write are critically important because they should support without restricting" (43). Support without restriction is the critical factor in reader response questions posed by the teacher and should permeate all literature discussion in true reader response classrooms.

The researcher used Probst's principles for instruction as a guide to determine whether the teachers observed were in fact reader response teachers. His six principles follow:

> 1) invite response to texts 2) give students time to shape and take confidence in their responses 3) find the links among students' responses 4) invite discussion and writing about self, text, others, and the culture of society 5) let the talk build and grow as naturally as possible, encouraging an organic flow for the discussion 6) look back to

other texts, other discussions, other experiences, and forward to what students might read next, what they might write tomorrow

The three teachers differed in the degree to which they incorporated these principles into their curriculum. While the researcher did observe on occasion various writing assignments, the results will focus only on questioning styles. Writing would perhaps influence the degree to which the teachers were considered reader response or traditional, but the researcher found that these three teachers shared writing curriculum ideas to the extent that there was little difference in their assignments. Writing for all three teachers thus appeared to be reader response oriented. The focus of observation was on variances in style, personality and methodology associated with teacher questioning found in observable classroom discussion. Oral classroom discourse is also generally more spontaneous and thus reflects a teacher's style to a greater degree than student writing assignments or other classroom activities.

In organizing the data, the researcher chose to determine whether questions qualified as reader response in their orientation or not according to Probst's suggested model questions for the approach and emphasis on reader response in the classroom. Following is a discussion of Probst's five suggested generic questions:

1. Asks students to focus on what took place in their minds as they read: Read the text and record what happens as you read-What do you remember, feel, question, see...?

2. Encourages students to concentrate on what was going on in the text:

What did you see happening in the text? What image was called to mind by the text? Upon what did you focus most intently as you read-What word, phrase, image, idea? What is the most important word in the text?

3. Asks students to compare their reading with those of other students: Please discuss your readings with your partner/ group. Did the text call to mind different memories, thoughts feelings?

4. Asks students to reflect on the context of the reading (classroom setting and related works): Does this text call to mind any other literary work? What is the connection?

5. Asks students to consider how meaning has evolved: How did your understanding of the text or your feelings about it change as you talked? How did you respond to it?

These questions provide a basis with which to determine whether the recorded questions of the three advanced placement teachers are in fact reader response oriented.

The findings will be discussed according to the degree to which each teacher incorporates reader response questions into his or her curriculum. The researcher will first consider the three teachers' questions in terms of how well they adhere to Probst's suggested model questions. The teachers' questioning style will also be considered in light of the teacher interviews and the philosophic stance they professed.

Teacher Questions

Each teacher varied in the degree and number of questions asked

which adhered to Probst's model reader response questions. Following is a discussion of questions asked by each of the three teachers, including information on the nature of classroom discussion and questioning and the conditions under which the teacher expected student response. See Appendix A for the grid used to compile data on the questions asked by the three teachers in congruence with Probst's model questions. The researcher chose to organize the data from the teachers' questions within the five questions designated by Probst. (For reference, see the previous description of these questions, hereafter they will be known as question 1, 2, etc.)

Teacher A: While the observer found no evidence of questions asked in Teacher A's classroom which corresponded to Probst's question #1, Teacher A did ask several questions which could be placed in Probst's question two category:

In the comparison of two poems, one by Keats, the other by Frost:

> "What do you want to talk about first, theme or style?"
> "How would you describe the poem?"

Teacher A frequently asked questions similar to Probst's question four regarding the context of the reading. The students in this classroom are encouraged to make connections with other works or the world around them whenever possible. He asks the following questions during an introduction to an activity after reading an essay by John Stuart Mill:

> "Where do we see satire today?"
> "What would the ideal political leader be like?"
> "Can you think of examples in society today?"
> "This essay could be compared to what other book we've read?"

While the questions listed above indicate Teacher A asks few questions related to reader response theory, the level of discussion in teacher A's classroom indicated the students were making connections to their own lives, to other reading material, and with their writing. This seemed intuitive and natural and not the concerted effort of the teacher. Following is a series of questions on The Native Son which the researcher found to be very nearly categorizable as reader response questions, had they only been less teacher-directed and more open-ended.

"How do you get rid of the self?"
"Could you say self-cancellation is giving up yourself and becoming part of society?"
"Why has Bigger committed these crimes?"
"How else has he canceled the self? What other way?"
"Are the murders of Mary and Bessie self-cancellation or self-assertion?"
"Why does he murder?"

Teacher A, according to Probst's suggestions, asked reader response questions least often, yet the level of discussion and student/teacher interaction was much higher than in teacher B's classroom. Teacher A frequently facilitated class discussion, but talk focused more on higher level thinking questions and textual content than connections or personal reactions to the reading. Teacher A could easily move classes toward more reader response oriented activities and discussion by encouraging the students to ask more questions and take a more active role in discussion and by reducing the amount of purely textual based questions.

Teacher B: Some of Teacher B's questions did fit into the reader response schemata; unlike Teacher A, B asked several questions in congruence with

Probst's question #1. Teacher B asks regarding an essay written by Alice Walker:

> "Does this seem weird to you?"
> "Does anyone have any experiences like that?"
> "Did you feel excluded by the 'we'?"

All of the above questions correspond to Probst's question one, and each facilitated some class discussion regarding exclusion and segregation.

Teacher B asked questions which correspond to Probst's question two. In a lesson on an essay about the Civil War:

> "What do those first sentences do?"
> "Is there an effect repeating the word 'studies' might have? What happens?"

In an article by Gloria Steinem:

> "Is it written to females? Males? What does she expect her audience to bring to the article?"
> "What is she doing?"
> "What would you say the purpose of this essay is?"

Teacher B asked no questions which correspond to Probst's question three of reader response while the researcher was present, although the teacher did indicate that group work was occasionally incorporated into the curriculum. Since the researcher observed only two-three days each week, group work could have occurred at times exclusive of those visits.

Teacher B asked several questions regarding the context of the reading (Probst's question four). During the discussion of Alice Walker's essay teacher B asked:

> "Who does this remind you of?"

"Where does this come from?"
"Where else have you seen this technique?"

In the study of Gloria Steinem's essay teacher B asks:

"If you were confronted with a magazine of heterosexual males in swimsuits what would you think?"

Teacher B occasionally asked her students to make connections with previous reading or outside sources, but often answered these questions without waiting or probing the students for answers.

Attempting to initiate closure after the discussion of several essays, teacher B asked the following questions which correspond with Probst's question five.

After considering two drafts of the civil war essay:

"What are we supposed to feel with that second draft?"
"What was your reaction to that story?" (Gloria Steinem essay) Men? How many of you have seen the swimsuit issue? Did you like it? Why not?"
"Why write this?"

Teacher B tries to ascertain both the students' reactions to the essays and any possible alterations in attitudes from the beginning of the discussions by asking the questions listed above. Teacher B asked several questions which correspond with Probst's list of reader response questions, yet there was little wait time and few attempts to urge student discussion regarding reactions to or understanding of the text, or the thought processes involved in such endeavors.

Teacher B, while occasionally asking questions which fit Probst's

description of a reader response classroom, predominantly asked questions which encouraged students to interpret the text as a work within itself, without relating any themes or concepts to their own lives. Teacher B's questions, while mostly requiring higher level thinking, often were answered by Teacher B and not the students; thus, classroom discussion and student participation were not often encouraged. Teacher B's questions generally had one "correct" answer which conceivably could be found through careful probing of the text. Those questions which did qualify as reader response by Probst's standards did not seem to come naturally to Teacher B.

Teacher C: After reading aloud the poem "Porphyria's Lover" by Robert Browning, Teacher C asks the following questions which correspond to Probst's question #1:

> "What do you think Molly. Tell me what happens in this poem. Tell me the story."

In a later class teacher C reformulates the question:

> "What do you see? What's this poem about?"

Teacher C allows the students to initiate the discussion and determine the focus:

> "Which character should we begin with?"
> "As you read Wuthering Heights, what kind of questions would you like to ask the author about her book?"

Teacher C encourages the students to focus on the text, but in this initial phase in a personal manner, comparable to freewriting in the writing process. Questions of this nature evoke a comfortable atmosphere where students share opinions and initial reactions to a text, where the topics under

discussion are determined and where teacher C discovers how the students reacted individually to the text.

Probst's question one leads directly into question two, the first dealing with individual thoughts, the second with personal textual interpretation. Teacher C asks questions predominantly at this level, encouraging students to interpret the text individually, to offer educated judgments based on personal experience and textual evidence. Several examples of this type of questioning occur during poetry discussion.

Teacher C asks the following questions after reading the poem "Porphyria's Lover".

> "What is she like to begin with? Why does he strangle her?
> Did that surprise you?"
> "He doesn't make love to her. Why?
> What should he do here? What is the normal response?
> Why would he not respond?"
> "Is the poem sexual?"

After reading "Rosencrantz and Gildenstern" Teacher C asks the class:

> "Could you make a leap and guess at what its about?"

Such a question eventually leads into a discussion of a student play being performed at one of the local high schools, an absurdist play as well.

Question three focuses on group work, where students compare their ideas about a text. Teacher C often has students pair up and discuss a poem or section of a novel before whole class discussion, and specifically before writing about a text. Teacher C also utilizes this time to speak with individual students about their writing, class work and other matters. Teacher C initiated a discussion about the poem mentioned previously "Porphyria'a

Lover", by having students divide into pairs and discuss their initial reactions to the poem and their understanding of its meaning. After the pairs discuss the poem for about ten minutes, she begins a whole class discussion by asking individual students their interpretations/initial feelings/reactions.

"What descriptions did you come up with Hunter?"
"Mike, what did you come up with?"
"Mike tell us what happens in this story. Start with...?"

While the researcher observed only one instance of small group textual discussion, teacher C commented that this method was often used to initiate whole group discussion, particularly with a difficult text or difficult subject matter. Teacher C also commented that this method worked well with several of her classes but provoked only general conversation in others.

Teacher C frequently urged students to reflect on previous reading and to make connections with outside material. Contextual questions were asked throughout the discussion of a particular work, initiated regularly by the teacher, occasionally by the student. Again referring to "Porphyria's Lover" Teacher C asked the following questions:

"What else have you read about Browning?"
"What else have you read by Browning?"
"Let's make a leap to the Duke in the Last Duchess. Would you consider this man insane?"

In reference to the earlier mentioned play "Rosencrantz and Gildenstern" Teacher C asks the class:

"Have you ever read Kafka or Camus?"
"Have you ever read "The Trial"?
"What do you know about absurdist literature at this point?"
"Did you read a story called "Rhinoceros" in third grade?"

In a conversation about "Hamlet" in which the students chose which character and theme they wanted to discuss that day, Teacher C mentions women in other plays by Shakespeare, following an argument about the role of Ophelia in "Hamlet".

> "What about Beatrice? Is she a strong woman? What about Katherine?"
> "Do these women have anything in common with Ophelia?"

Question five asks students to reflect on the text and consider their perceptions after discussion, after perhaps a second reading. These questions are often used by Teacher C as closure, or as an introduction to a writing assignment about the text. Teacher C often asks questions of this sort to check for understanding after reading/discussing a particularly difficult work. After using a Shakespearean sonnet to discuss poetic devices and to initiate a preparatory advanced placement writing assignment, Teacher C asks:

> "What else? Do you like the poem?"
> "Does that help you clarify?"
> "What do you like best about that poem?"

After reviewing a selection of poems for the next poetry response, Teacher C asks the students:

> "Which are your six favorite ones? Do you like "The Indifferent"?
> "Which one would you most likely send to someone you love? Which do you like the least?"

Teacher C's curriculum appeared to be based largely on reader response theory, thus permeating not only questions asked but classroom activities,

discussion and writing as well. Teacher C, according to the researcher, incorporated all of Probst's questions into the curriculum, asking questions during class discussion which coincided with not only his questions but his principles of instruction as well.

In summary then, the researcher found one teacher whose questions cohered completely with Probst's suggested model of reader response questions. The other two teachers varied in their degree of reader response orientation, and also differed in specific ways from each other and from the reader response teacher.

Teacher Interviews

The interview portion of this study was designed to determine how teachers who are preparing students for college feel about the idea of open discussion and the concept of reader response in their classroom. The interview questions can be found in Appendix B; the results are as follows.

Teacher A, according to the interview, has a predominantly student-centered classroom, but realizes a teacher must work each day to focus on the students and not control the entire discussion. Teacher A claims to compensate for a tendency to regress to a more traditional teaching style by having the students teach each other and by offering a variety of theoretical and student interpretations to works of literature on a regular basis. Teacher A also professes to provide a variety of different learning situations for the students "I don't like to do the same thing all the time" and in the process, "I attempt to determine which methods work best for each student, and for me."

Teacher A varies the desk arrangement in the classroom every few days, believing that desk formation directs the class towards the format of the lesson, whether lecture or discussion.

Teacher B tends to be more student-centered with the advanced placement classes than with the regular English classes. At the same time B believes the degree of student involvement depends on "the day and the mood of the students." Teacher B finds reader response discussion difficult when students have not completed the reading assignments. If the reading has not been finished by the assigned time, teacher B generally gives "pop quizzes" which are far removed from the reader response philosophy. The answers deal with surface content only--color of shoes, name of location, etc.

The students believe Teacher C is highly student-centered, although Teacher C paradoxically admits "really I'm the one in control." Teacher C says the ultimate test of teaching style depends on the types of questions a teacher asks. Teacher C says that questions must give the students ownership and must encourage discussion or even confrontation. C believes in student interaction: "listening and hearing are so important." Teacher C likes to begin a lesson with an opening question which sets the tone for discussion and encourages the students to ask their own questions.

Each of the teachers articulates a pedagogy in which "there are no right answers in my classroom." The teachers replies indicate that they differ in their method of dealing with answers or comments which they feel are totally off base or confusing.

Teacher A says the students are encouraged "to focus on

understanding the literature being discussed and to connect new learning with previous literary discussion." Teacher A claims to often uses the variety of answers and questions provided by students to encourage levels of thinking. Teacher A also "tries to be sensitive to the individual while asking how he or she arrived at a specific conclusion." Teacher A commented that classmates often notice an answer given by a student which they find unusual or unacceptable. Teacher A claims that peer questioning is less alienating to the student who must defend a response and that continued probing by fellow students will often cause the student to either alter or clarify further his or her statement.

Teacher B encourages "lots of possibilities" in class discussion and only questions answers which "come totally from left field." Teacher B feels students should be able to prove their conclusions in the text with sufficient and consistent evidence. Teacher B agrees with Teacher A that other students will often question the validity of a student's response. Teacher A does not object to this sort of questioning, but does enforce strict rules regarding respect of classmates. Teacher B also claims to ask leading questions which tend to guide the discussion in a particular direction and alleviate "incorrect" responses.

Teacher C, who according to interview answers has the most clearly student oriented pedagogy, believes there are few right answers to anything, particularly in literature. Teacher C admits, "the questions I raise don't have right answers--they are honest questions." Teacher C professes to consider and ponder these "honest questions" with the students. Teacher C believes

enough trust has been established in the classroom to allow for open questions, admitting "the questions are the key." Teacher C feels that if the teacher values what students think the students will also value what they think. Teacher C admits to asking obvious questions which make the students see the error in their thinking in the case of "odd" answers. Teacher C will also restate the question so that the given response has more credence and value, in order to affirm the student without confusing the rest of the class. "Nothing is as important as their egos" Teacher C believes, "if destroyed, they may never read anything else."

The teachers had varied answers to the questions of who speaks more in the classroom. Teacher A admitted reluctantly that "in reality the teacher always talks more than the students." Teacher A did profess, however, that during discussion the students were responsible for asking questions while the teacher existed only as a resource, which did not agree with the data recorded by the researcher.

Teacher B claims the amount of talking depends on the chemistry of the day and the class and said that during the introduction of a new unit the teacher will speak the majority of the time. The content decides, Teacher B believes; thus the amount of student interaction and discussion in this classroom will differ from day to day.

Teacher C feels that the talking is about equal, although "in all honesty they probably talk more." Teacher C believes this sort of situation is achieved by developing a more personal relationship with the students than perhaps is the norm. Teacher C also attempts to speak to several students each day; the

goal is to speak to each student at least once per week. "There should not be a dichotomy between teacher and student," Teacher C affirms, "I'm a person and my students are people."

While in some instances, particularly with Teacher C, interview answers corresponded with classroom observations, in many other cases the interview and observation results were quite disparate. Possible explanation and discussion of such disparity will be explained in the following chapter.

DISCUSSION

Research in Practice

The observations and interviews provided diverse and plentiful results regarding reader response theory in the high school English classroom. However, in order to determine the extent to which these findings on the congruence between reader response questions and reader response labels are valid, it is useful to consider the previously mentioned research on reader response and related theories and their use in the high school curriculum in relation to the observed reader response practices. As the researcher suspected prior to the observations, the three teachers' adherence to reader response practices was related to their personality, and their authentic preference for either student centered, reader response classrooms or teacher-centered classrooms. The two teachers who were not considered reader response teachers varied in their degree of teacher-centeredness, as shown by the types of questions they asked and the amount of discussion they encouraged in their classes. It is important to consider the effectiveness of the practices of the presumed reader response teacher as well as the other, more teacher-centered teachers. In order to overcome the limitations of this non-experimental research, the findings will now be considered in relation to the preexisting literature on reader response theory.

Loosely defined, the three teachers each fell into a particular style or

theoretical methodology discussed earlier in the literature review section. As to why the teachers differed in significant and categorical ways, the researcher is not prepared to determine, other than to offer the explanation that perhaps teaching style, particularly in relation to reader response, depends on each teacher's individual personality. The researcher found that knowledge of a particular theory is sometimes not enough to make the concepts a part of daily classroom pedagogy. A teacher may not fully understand the philosophy, or their personality may not agree with the theory, or they may not have seen the concept fully adopted in a classroom. Each of the three teachers had a specific teaching style, just as they each had an individual personality. The teacher who was found to be a reader response teacher had traveled to England several years ago and studied firsthand the concepts and implications of reader response. This teacher has been sharing reader response theory and activities with fellow teachers since that time; thus, teachers A and B are only now learning about a theory Teacher C has been developing, using, and pondering for years. Each teacher's questioning style is summarized below.

Teacher A, as mentioned in the results chapter, frequently asked higher order thinking questions, (according to Bloom's taxonomy), and questions which promoted contextual exploration in the classroom. Teacher A exhibited on many occasions what could be seen as a New Critical approach to teaching. The text was always the focus for discussion in Teacher A's classes: no personal associations were sought or even accepted. Students' feelings and emotions as separate from the text were rarely discussed. Various

interpretations of a work were encouraged in Teacher A's classes, although the students were always required tojustify their assumptions with textual evidence. Teacher A encouraged students to consider alternate interpretations of a text based on readings of feminist theorists, Marxist theorists, and others, but often failed to consider the students' personal reactions and feelings toward a particular text or theme of a unit under study.

Discussion took place in teacher A's class on a regular basis, but the conversation focused more on teacher questions and student answers than student focused discussion. As mentioned earlier by Purves, "...simply asking 'higher order' questions will not automatically promote the multidimensional insights and emotional responses necessary for a complete encounter with literature" (123). This research implies that teachers have been chastised by researchers in the past for not asking enough higher order questions and that now the argument goes beyond the realm of question and answer. Students, they would suggest, must be taught not only to think for themselves and to ask their own questions but to make their own connections. Purves believes, in fact, that too many critical thinking questions stifle rather than enlarge the understanding students have of a work of literature. Research indicates that students need to be involved in the literature, personally and emotionally, in order to truly grapple with difficult concepts or material.

While the discussion level for Teacher A was still relatively high, despite the lack of reader response questions, Teacher B's classroom focused on a much more traditional, lecture oriented style of learning with very little

discussion or student participation. According to Probst, in a traditional classroom "...students are taught...that making sense of their own lives is less important than analyzing how writers make sense of theirs" (42). Teacher B, while not always focusing on authorial background or historical context, did frequently include such information in the lectures, particularly during opportune moments for class discussion. Instead of encouraging students to share their related experiences to a particular essay, Teacher B would share personal history or knowledge of a specific event which perhaps prompted the essay under consideration. While often such information can be useful in a discussion, there still needs to be a time when students' reactions to the work are considered, entirely separate from the historical implications or strict textual justification from within a piece.

Teacher C, as mentioned in the results chapter, adhered strongly to the practice of reader response theory in the classroom. Teacher C encouraged small and large group discussion on a daily basis, frequently assigned informal writing on a text before class discussion, assigned journal responses to a series of poems which altered every month, and supported the use of students' personal language and responses to the literature under discussion. Teacher C's questions were open questions--they taught students how to develop "confidently personal responses to the literature" (Lunn 69). These open questions, according to reader response advocates, are much more difficult to produce and continue than higher order, textual based questions. Reader response questions often cannot be predetermined; they depend on the nature of the class, the point being discussed, the mood of the students

and the students' reaction to the text. One of the keys to developing a reader response classroom is the willingness of the teacher to allow more student freedom. According to Beach and Marshall, reader response teachers must provide "a structure that allows them [the students] freedom at the same time it points them in potentially rewarding directions" (101). A successful reader response teacher will have the students' best interest at heart and will have both the ability and desire to enlighten students not only about a specific piece of literature, but the drive to create a meaningful, lasting and worthwhile experience as well.

Reader response teachers like Teacher C believe students and teachers are involved in a shared experience, that "in that questioning and sharing of experience, students and teachers become empowered to embrace the difficulties and complexities unique to literary reading" (Hynds 136). This type of classroom, where open and honest discussion occurs on a daily basis, does not happen immediately at the beginning of the year. Teachers must encourage and cultivate a safe classroom where risk-taking is possible. Teacher C mentioned in the interview that risk-takers generally perform well in the classroom, and their efforts are rewarded regularly. By "enabling the students to make intelligent judgments" (Rosenblatt 176), Teacher C has helped develop a sense of confidence and constant opportunities for success in the students, making the classroom not one of divine inspiration, where the teacher has all of the answers, but one of shared intellectual discussion, shared emotional and personal discussion and ultimately, a classroom of success.

Recommendations

The findings of this study strongly indicate that immersion in theory, from studying implications and background to actual observations of its, use is necessary for a theory to be accurately practiced in the classroom. In addition, teacher personality will influence the degree to which a teacher is able and/or willing to alter or continue his or her current classroom pedagogy, particularly his or her method of classroom discourse. Teacher personality, in fact, greatly influences questioning style, teacher or student centeredness, and overall teaching philosophy. A study involving one teacher in a comparative study between the achievement of a control group and the achievement of a group exposed to reader response questions and theory would help alleviate bias due to teacher personality and would possibly provide more definitive conclusions regarding the positive effects of reader response theory in the high school English classroom.

Only one of the three observed teachers clearly and consistently incorporated reader response questions into class discussion, yet each to varying degrees did attempt to create open, student directed discussion of the literature. The key seems to be the development of a safe, comfortable environment where student opinions are validated and where true questions are asked by teachers--those that have no "right" answers. Two of the teachers seemed to have a difficult time moving into authentic reader response practice, although each expressed a desire for increased discussion in

their classrooms. Teachers aware of new trends in education must absorb them more deeply and attempt to understand the new concepts thoroughly or else confusion will arise. This is particularly true when the ideas do not coincide with their personal style or teaching philosophy. Teachers need to be made deeply aware of the general methodology and strategies which accompany a new approach. Thus, this study recommends that English teachers fully be exposed to reader response philosophy, both the theoretical implications and actual behaviors and kinds of classroom conversation it promotes.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine the questions about texts that teachers in advanced placement English classrooms asked their students. These questions were then studied to determine whether the teacher asked what Probst classified as reader response questions and to see if the questions they asked illustrated an overall reader response classroom philosophy. The researcher found that questioning style, at least in relation to reader response, depends on knowledge of specific methodology regarding a theory, such as reader response, as well as individual teacher personality. The teachers varied in their degree of faithfulness regarding questioning and teaching style predictions. Perhaps such findings indicate that the way we perceive ourselves is not necessarily the way others see us, at least not one hundred percent of the time. The discrepancy this researcher found indicates that frequent sharing of materials, methodology and new theories by teachers in

addition to classroom observations by fellow teachers would allow teachers to take on new teaching approaches in a more thoroughgoing fashion. Too often, teachers isolate themselves, believing they are alone responsible for discerning new educational concepts and testing their educational theories, whether their own or others.

To an extent, the three teachers I observed share lesson plans and books on a regular basis, which invariably leads me to believe that personality must drive, to a degree, the actualization of any theory under consideration. The two teachers who did not regularly incorporate reader response style into their class discussions preferred to have complete control in their classroom. They showed a continual desire to uncover the "correct" meaning of a text, even in spite of contentious class discussion and often provided the "answers" themselves. During the interviews, the researcher found that both of these teachers appeared interested in adopting the reader response approach, and in increasing class discussion and student involvement and responsibility. Perhaps they need only develop a deeper understanding of reader response philosophy in order to change the atmosphere of their classes.

Teacher A and Teacher B did not congruent with reader response theory, although the researcher did find that they fit perfectly into other categories of teaching style. Teacher C's teaching style, and specifically questioning techniques, were completely congruent with reader response philosophy, particularly in relation to Probst's suggested questions. This teacher exhibited a strong understanding and use of reader response in the

classroom and also most closely resembled the earlier interview remarks. This teacher appeared comfortable with the atmosphere and level of discussion in the classroom and appeared pleased with the transition (made several years earlier) to a more student-centered curriculum. Often teachers who move in this direction discover afterwards that a theory exists which explains their own discoveries and insights. Teachers who feel comfortable sitting with their students (not standing in front of them or behind the lectern) generally experience an eventual sense of relief and renewed excitement about teaching. Teaching becomes enjoyable, enlightening and fresh when teachers listen to the students and ask questions which have no prepared, preconceived answers.

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APPENDIX A

The three teachers' (A, B, and C) questions were rated according to their degree of congruence with the five model questions designed by Probst. The graph the researcher used to determine these findings is shown below. Results were listed according to extensive use of this reader response question (+), some examples of this type of question (o), or no findings of this question during the observations (-).

	1	2	3	4	5
A	−	+	−	+	−
B	o	+	−	+	o
C	+	+	+	+	+

APPENDIX B

Thesis Interview

1. As a teacher, do you consider your classroom to be more teacher or student centered? Why?

2. During class discussion, do you prefer to conclude with or include the "correct" answers if you feel they have not been adequately provided in the discussion?

3. What do you do if a student, during class discussion, gives what you consider an entirely wrong answer?

4. Who talks more in your classes--you or the students?